

FOOTWEAR SOLE AND METHOD FOR FORMING THE SAME
FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates generally to a footwear sole and a method for forming the same. More particularly, the present invention relates to a textile-covered footwear sole and a method for forming a textile-covered footwear sole.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

10 The literature is replete with descriptions of footwear and footwear soles. For example, U.S. Patent No. 1,231,263 to Kelley describes a fleeced slipper sole having an outer member, which includes a stiffening layer inclosed between a pair of fabric or thin leather layers.

15 U.S. Patent No. 1,795,305 to Jacob describes a slipper having a wearing sole stitched to a lining.

20 U.S. Patent No. 3,800,445 to Greenblatt et al. describes a scuff slipper, which includes an outsole and an inner sole. A bead of the outsole is molded around the periphery of the inner sole to secure the inner sole to the outsole.

25 U.S. Patent No. 3,930,275 to Bailin describes a method of fabricating a slipper. The slipper includes a sole having a substantially flat form and a die-cut boundary edge configuration generally corresponding to the shape of the human foot.

U.S. Patent No. 4,295,238 to Clark describes a footwear article having a molded sole unit.

30 U.S. Patent No. 4,571,851 to Yamada describes a disposable slipper formed of thick paper or corrugated cardboard.

U.S. Patent No. 4,852,272 to Chilewich et al. describes a slipper sock construction. The slipper sock construction includes a knit sock, a flexible foam insert and a flexible sole. One surface of the foam insert is glued to the sole, and the other surface of the foam insert is glued to the outside surface of the knit sock. The foam insert, sole and knit sock are then sewn about the periphery of the foam insert and sole.

U.S. Patent No. 4,858,337 to Barma describes a vulcanized rubber footwear product having an insole, a midsole affixed to the insole. An outer sole is secured to the midsole.

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U.S. Patent No. 4,899,412 to Ganon describes a slipper and a method of making a slipper. The slipper includes an outsole formed of a layer of terrycloth adhesively attached to a thin layer formed of a thin tissue-like material.

5 U.S. Patent No. 5,033,144 to Ganon describes a slipper having an outsole pad formed of synthetic rubber.

U.S. Patent Nos. 5,392,532 and 5,491,860 to Bray et al. describe a slipper having an insole attached to a peripheral outsole wall. The outsole is molded of a resilient material.

10 U.S. Patent No. 5,515,566 to Ganon describe a moccasin construction having a sole liner and a sole.

U.S. Patent No. 5,617,585 to Fons et al. describes a rubber soled slipper sock having a rubber sole liner.

15 U.S. Patent No. 5,746,014 to Tanemoto describes a slipper having an upper sheet and a lower sheet adhered together to form a sole.

U.S. Patent No. 5,983,527 to Strickland et al. describes a molded shoe assembly having an outer sole with a heat activatable adhesive coated on one surface and absorbed in the sole surface.

20 U.S. Patent No. 5,992,054 to Rauch describes a shoe having an outsole, an insole and a sealing material injected between the outsole and the insole.

Finally, U.S. Patent No. 6,035,555 to Pavelescu et al. describes a waterproof shoe having an outer layer and a monofilament netting sewn to the outer layer.

25 It is an object of the present invention to provide a footwear sole having improved wear resistance, improved slip resistance and/or improved traction. It is another object of the present invention to provide a footwear sole having an outer textile layer.

SUMMARY

The above and other beneficial objects of the present invention are most effectively attained by providing a footwear sole and a method for forming a footwear sole as described and claimed herein. In one embodiment, the footwear sole is formed of a rubber-like material having a textile layer at least partially impregnated into an outside surface of the rubber-like outer sole. The outer surface of the textile layer defines the outer surface of the footwear sole.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings:

Figure 1 is an exploded view of a footwear sole according to the present invention;

5 Figure 2 is a side elevational view of the footwear sole illustrated in Figure 1;

Figures 3A - 3D illustrate a first manufacturing sequence for forming the footwear sole illustrated in Figures 1 and 2;

Figures 4A - 4C illustrate a second manufacturing sequence for forming the footwear sole illustrated in Figures 1 and 2;

10 Figures 5A - 5F illustrate a third manufacturing sequence for forming the footwear sole illustrated in Figures 1 and 2;

Figure 6A is a bottom plan view of a first exemplary embodiment footwear sole according to the present invention; and

15 Figure 6B is a bottom plan view of a second exemplary embodiment footwear sole according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Those skilled in the art will gain an appreciation of the present invention from a reading of the following description when viewed in conjunction with the 20 accompanying drawings of Figures 1 - 6B, inclusive. The individual reference characters designate the same or similar elements throughout the several views.

Referring now to Figure 1, there is seen an exploded view of a footwear sole 10 according to the present invention. Footwear sole 10 includes an inner sole 14 and an outer sole 16. Inner sole 14 is preferably formed of a rubber material or a 25 rubber-like and molded into appropriate shape and size according to conventional techniques. More preferably, inner sole 14 is formed of a TPR (thermoplastic rubber) material or polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Outer sole 16 is formed of a fabric material. Preferably, outer sole 16 is formed of a woven material and formed of natural fibers or a blend thereof. More particularly, outer sole 16 is formed of woven 30 cotton. It should be appreciated, however, the outer sole 16 may be formed of any textile material. Also illustrated in Figure 1 is a footwear article 12, which may be, for example, a slipper, a shoe, a boot or any other article of footwear.

Referring now to Figure 2, there is seen a side elevational view of the footwear sole illustrated in Figure 1. As seen in Figure 2, outer sole 16 defines the outer-most layer of the footwear article.

Figures 3A - 3D illustrate a first manufacturing sequence for forming footwear sole 10. As indicated above, inner sole 14 is preferably formed of a rubber material according to conventional molding or other conventional forming techniques. Figure 3A illustrates inner sole 14 as initially formed. One surface of inner sole 14 defines an outer surface 15a, and the opposite surface of inner sole 14 defines an inner surface 15b. Outer surface 15a may include knobs 20 or other skid-resistance, wear-resistance or traction-enhancing structures formed during the forming of the inner sole 14. As illustrated in Figure 3B, a fabric layer 16a is placed upon the outer surface 15a of inner sole 14. As illustrated in Figure 3C, a forming die 18 is pressed onto the fabric layer 16a and inner sole 14 to conform the fabric layer 16a to the shape of inner sole 14. Forming die 18 includes one or more heating elements 22, which are energized to heat the forming die 18. The forming die 18 thereby applies heat and pressure to the fabric layer 16a and the inner sole 14 to melt or at least soften at least an outer surface portion of inner sole 14. The melted or softened outer surface portion of inner sole 14 allows the fabric layer 16a to become at least partially impregnated into the inner sole 14, thereby securing the fabric layer 16a to inner sole 14. Thereafter, any excess portion of fabric layer 16a is removed and any excess portion of inner sole 14 is removed, thereby forming footwear sole 10 defined by inner sole 14 and outer sole 16, which is at least partially impregnated into inner sole 14. It should be appreciated that a plurality of inner soles 14 may be first formed, the fabric layer 16a placed over the plurality of inner soles 14 and the forming die 18 applied to the fabric layer 16a and the plurality of inner soles 14 to thereby simultaneously form a plurality of footwear soles 10. It should also be appreciated that the fabric layer 16a may be glued or otherwise applied to the inner sole 14 without the application of heat. It should be further appreciated that fabric layer 16a may be applied to the outer surface 15a of inner sole 14 while the inner sole 14, or at least the outer surface 15a thereof, is in a softened state immediately after forming the inner sole 14 before the same has cooled. By providing a fabric outer sole 16, the footwear sole 10 of the present invention provides increased wear resistance, increased slip resistance and/or improved traction. In addition, the

footwear sole 10 of the present invention provides increased resistance to the scuffing of a floor by an exposed rubber footwear sole.

Referring now to Figures 4A - 4C, there is seen a second manufacturing sequence for forming footwear sole 10. As seen in Figure 4A, fabric layer 16a is first placed between first mold section 30 and second mold section 32. A cavity 34 is formed in second mold section 32 and defines the geometry of the inner sole 14. An injection port 36 is provided for injecting the material for forming the inner sole 14. As seen in Figure 4B, the inner sole material 14a is injected into the cavity 34 through the injection port 36 in a molten, fluid or at least softened state. A vent, not shown, may be provided to exhaust gases contained within the cavity while the material 14a is being injected into the cavity. The material 14a is absorbed, or impregnated, into the fabric material 16a. After the material 14a has sufficiently cooled and set, any excess material 14a and any excess fabric 16a is removed to thereby form inner sole 14 and outer sole 16 and, thus, footwear sole 10 as shown in Figure 4C. As described above with respect to the first manufacturing sequence illustrated in Figures 3A-3D, a plurality of footwear soles 10 may be formed simultaneously.

Referring now to Figures 5A - 5E, there is seen a third manufacturing sequence for forming footwear sole 10. As seen in Figure 5A, a device for forming footwear sole 10 includes an extruder 40, a first mold section 44 and a second mold section 46. The extruder 40 includes a nozzle 42 through which the inner sole material 14a is extruded. It should be appreciated that extrusion is but one exemplary way of delivering the inner sole material 14a to the mold sections 44, 46 and that the present invention is in no way limited thereby. As seen in Figure 5B, the inner sole material 14a is extruded or otherwise delivered in the direction indicated by arrow A from the extruder 40 to the mold sections 44, 46. Once a sufficient quantity of inner sole material 14a is delivered to the mold sections 44, 46, the extrusion ceases. Thus, as seen in Figure 5C, the inner sole material 14a is disposed between the mold sections 44, 46. Thereafter, as seen in Figure 5D, outer sole material 16a is placed on one surface of the inner sole material 14a. It should be appreciated that the outer sole material 16a may be first placed between the mold sections 44, 46, and the inner sole material 14a extruded, or otherwise delivered, onto one surface of the outer sole material 16a. In either arrangement, the mold sections 44, 46 are thereafter brought together as shown in Figure 5E by

the arrows B, B. Heat and/or pressure are applied to the inner sole material 14a and the outer sole material 16a by at least one of the mold sections 44, 46.

After the application of heat and/or pressure for sufficient time to form and set the inner sole material 14a and at least partially impregnate the outer sole material

5 16a into at least one surface of the inner sole material 14a, the mold sections 44, 46 are separated as shown in Figure 5F by the arrows C, C. Thus, footwear sole 10 according to the present invention is formed.

Referring now to Figure 6A, there is seen a first exemplary embodiment 10 footwear sole 10' according to the present invention. As seen in Figure 6A, outer sole 16 covers substantially the entire outer surface of inner sole 14. Alternatively, as illustrated in Figure 6B, outer sole 16 may cover only a portion of the outer surface of inner sole 14. The second exemplary embodiment of footwear sole 10" 15 illustrated in Figure 6B includes a toe portion 24 of the inner sole 16 that is exposed. That is, toe portion 24 does not include outer sole 16. It should be appreciated that the first and second embodiments of footwear sole 10', 10" are intended to be exemplary and that any single or multiple portion of inner sole 14 may be provided with or without outer sole 16.

Thus, the several aforementioned objects and advantages of the present invention are most effectively attained. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that 20 many modifications of the preferred embodiments described hereinabove may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Although several preferred embodiments of the invention have been described and disclosed in detail herein, it should be understood that this invention is in no sense limited thereby and that its scope is to be determined by that of the appended claims.